

March 16, 2010

Cynthia Bryant, Chair
Strategic Growth Council
State Capitol Building, Room 100
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Support for Protected Land data proposal

Dear Madame Chair and Members of the Council,

The Strategic Growth Council has an opportunity to invest in a tool that will align conservation and infrastructure development so that infrastructure projects are expedited while conserving and enhancing the State's critical natural resources. By funding the development and stewardship of a protected lands database, infrastructure agencies and developers can avoid costly conflicts with protected landscapes and conservation can be more effectively achieved.

The Nature Conservancy urges the Council to fund the protected lands database, and provide the information to a wide audience so that local and regional entities, joint powers authorities, infrastructure agencies, nongovernmental organizations and private entities will have the opportunity to avoid unnecessary conflicts and enhance conservation.

The existing databases for this information are either incomplete or inaccurate. The information, however, is critical to accomplish a number of the Council's goals. For example, the public lands database could support Metropolitan Planning Organizations with up-to-date information on the location of parks and protected areas when developing Sustainable Communities Strategies; it could help infrastructure agencies do effective screening for project locations to improve the efficiency of project planning and delivery; and it could support organizations and agencies in development conservation plans or blueprint plans that will guide development and conservation for decades.

The Nature Conservancy has supported the development of the California Protected Area database in the last year because it is the most up-to-date, comprehensive and well-designed system that California has. We use the data in our work every day and recognize the foresight and initiative of GreenInfo Network in filling this critical data gap in the state. The time-consuming foundational work of collecting data on the location and management of protected areas has been laid, but funding for updates, refinement and ongoing stewardship remain a significant challenge, because data are typically not seen as an investment in efficiency. Yet, just as the maintenance of our roads, floodways, and levees are a critical infrastructure investment, so are data in the information-based economy.

Thank you for your consideration of this issue.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth O'Donoghue

Director of Land Use and Infrastructure